

## April 26, 2009 - Murtha Spokesman Explains Stimulus Bill Funding

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Area officials, business owners and others gathered with federal and state officials Friday at Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus to learn how they might benefit from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) with many of the attendees anxious to tap in to the funding source.

Also known as the federal stimulus bill, Pennsylvania is in the process of receiving approximately \$26 billion to aid a variety of agencies, programs and individuals, said presenters from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development and Labor and those representing the state Department of Education and state Department of Transportation along with the Small Business Administration.

Fay-Penn President Michael Krajovic said several county projects, including a proposed state of the art vocational-technical school and infrastructural improvement, would be fast tracked through the stimulus funding, if received.

"Education is the number one economic development priority," he said.  
"It would not be money for Fay-Penn, but money for the school districts to

make the (vocational technical) school project happen."

The proposed \$28 million facility is to be located in the University Technology Park located in North Union Township.

Although he did not attend the summit because of recent surgery, event organizer U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, said the priorities of the stimulus was to put people back to work and implement projects and programs that have lacked funding.

"It looks to me that we're now going in the right direction," he said via a teleconference with the attendees. "We're trying to eliminate as much of the bureaucracy as we can."

Pointing to a multi-million dollar allocation to the National Park Service through the U.S. Department of the Interior that will allow for the conversion from oil to geothermal heat at several buildings at Fort Necessity and the Johnstown Flood National Memorial along with other projects, Murtha said the federal agency anticipates nearly 20,000 jobs will be created as the improvements are undertaken at the various sites.

"We're not sure how well this is going to work, but we had to do something to turn this economy around," added Murtha.

For Connellsville Mayor Judy Reed, the city has many projects on the drawing board ready to go.

"We have a plan, feasibility studies and cost projections. We have money committed," she said. "We are site ready and ground ready, and we are building ready."

"A lot of work has gone into preparing these projects, and this (stimulus funding) is a wonderful opportunity."

The city has already received notice that its annual state Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation has been increased by more than \$90,000 due to the ARRA and a new train station is to be built through the stimulus funding.

"This is a great opportunity for the city," said Connellsville Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Michael Edwards. "And, we've already seen some of the benefits of the stimulus package."

The city has tentatively designated the additional CDBG funding for the upgrading of Woodruff Park.

Approximately \$1.25 million has been set aside for the Connellsville "retro-style" Amtrak station.

"We will continue to pursue funding for additional projects, such as the (former National Guard) Armory and the community center," said Edwards. "There appears to be a lot of opportunities and we will be looking at those where the city is eligible."

Lower Tyrone Township  
Supervisor Ken Frye said his community is in need of equipment, infrastructural and building improvements that cannot be undertaken at the present time.

"It is hard when we only have a \$200,000 budget," he said, adding that the officials will be filing applications and contacting the respective agencies for assistance. "We'll take any help we can get."

Brownsville Area School District Superintendent Dr. Philip Savini said the district was notified that it would receive additional funding through ARRA. However, the exact amount is unknown.

"We hope that the amount of money the government said the school districts will receive, holds true," said Savini. "I'm hoping if they say it is 'X' amount of dollars it is that amount so that we can implement our educational programs.

"As we finish up our budgets, that's going to play a major role."

Fayette County Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said the county could begin targeting infrastructural improvements through the ARRA funding.

"Despite my personal opinion on the stimulus package, as a county commissioner, sound judgment must be exercised when we prioritize our funding requests," she said. "Because as we heard there are not only strict guidelines for our county to receive these funds, but also, it looks as if the stimulus funds are being obligated, yet the receipt of the tax dollars isn't a given."

Zimmerlink said that local governments are in need of funding to complete road, sewerage and water projects.

"Government is suppose to use tax dollars for those type of projects," she said. "If the tax dollars are used in those larger projects, and the county sets the foundation, in my opinion, then the private market can come in and do what they do best - create the jobs."